

**Statement of  
The Honorable Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and  
Emergency Management  
Hearing On  
“Moving Mississippi Forward: Ongoing Progress and  
Remaining Problems”  
June 19, 2008**

We are pleased to welcome all of you, especially our Mississippi colleagues and our panel of witnesses, to this first hearing devoted exclusively to post-Katrina Mississippi and to how the Federal Emergency Management (FEMA) has served the needs of Mississippi for nearly three years since Hurricane Katrina.

We will be holding a hearing on Louisiana focusing principally on New Orleans this session. The demographics and geography of the Mississippi area are vastly different from big city New Orleans, which claimed much of the attention in the aftermath of the worst hurricane devastation in the nation's history. However, I flew low over affected Mississippi counties shortly after Katrina and saw first hand areas that quite literally had been blown away. The devastated Mississippi areas may not be as well known as legendary New Orleans, but they have been of equal importance to the Subcommittee.

Three years after Hurricane Katrina, it is apparent that there are still outstanding recovery issues in Mississippi. For example, there are reports that 67 of Mississippi's 82 counties still have trailers within their jurisdictions. As of May, FEMA reports that there are 6,414 temporary housing units in use in Mississippi.

This Subcommittee has jurisdiction over the activities and recovery programs of FEMA which are authorized by the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act and include the Individuals and Household Program, the Public Assistance Program, and Hazard Mitigation Grant Programs. Mississippi has benefited from significant the pre- and post-Katrina legislation of this Subcommittee, including major improvements in the Stafford Act and to FEMA's disaster assistance programs in the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000. In the 109th Congress, the Committee approved H.R. 5316, which became the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006 (FEMA Reform Act).

Perhaps most important in this Congress has been the Subcommittee's leadership on H.R. 1144, the Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma Federal Match Relief Act of 2007, to provide significant relief for communities devastated by these hurricanes. H.R. 1144 waives the non-Federal share of certain FEMA disaster assistance provided to Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, and Florida under title IV of the Stafford Act by increasing the Federal share for the Public Assistance and Other Needs Assistance programs to 100 percent. Importantly, H.R. 1144 allows for the cancellation of loans to local governments for recovery from Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma if the local governments meet the statutory test outlined in Section 417 of the Stafford Act. The legislation passed last year as part of the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations bill, PL 110-28.

In order to address the outstanding needs identified by members of the Mississippi and Louisiana delegations in the Subcommittee's May 10, 2007, hearing "Legislative Fixes for Lingering Problems that Hinder Katrina," the Subcommittee passed H.R. 3247, the Hurricanes Katrina and Rita Recovery Facilitation Act of 2007. The House passed the bill on October 29, 2007.

H.R. 3247 is designed to provide additional Federal relief targeted to Mississippi and Louisiana and, if enacted, would be applicable to the relief efforts in Mississippi. The bill increases the Federal in-lieu contribution for alternate projects from the current level of 75 percent to 90 percent; authorizes the FEMA Administrator to include Gulf Coast recovery efforts under a public assistance pilot project authorized by the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act (P.L. 109-295); permits the use of third parties to review and expedite public assistance appeals through the use of alternative dispute resolution procedures; allows the use of temporary housing for volunteers assisting in the recovery and reconstruction efforts in the Gulf Coast; allows FEMA to use a simplified procedure, under which small projects are permitted to proceed based on estimates, for projects up to \$100,000, an increase from the current level of \$55,000; authorizes re-interment of remains in private cemeteries; and waives the requirement that certain certifications in the hazard mitigation grant program occur prior to commencing projects. We were at pains to get this bill to the floor early last year and regret that it has not yet passed the Senate. However, we understand that this bill is now on its way to the Senate floor.

P.L. 110-161, the Kids in Disasters Well-being, Safety, and Health Act resulted from the concerns of many on the Committee about the problems with meeting the special needs of children displaced by Katrina. About a quarter of the people who lived in the ravaged areas were under the age of 18, and more than 400,000 of them were under the age of five. The National Commission on Children and Disasters will conduct a comprehensive study to examine the needs of children as they relate to preparation, response and recovery from emergencies and disasters.

Today we will be particularly interested in the overall housing policy, the rebuilding of public infrastructure and the case management services being provided through FEMA during these years of continuing recovery in Mississippi. We are particularly pleased to be able to hear from witnesses on the ground about whether the residents of Mississippi are being well served by the authority, programs and policies of FEMA in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. We welcome Members of Congress, FEMA, local citizens of Mississippi, and volunteer coordinators. The Subcommittee looks forward to hearing from each of you who have been active in Mississippi's recovery and to hearing your recommendations.